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Stuart, Henry Harvey

Man or money -- which?

[Newcastle, N.B.]

[1912]

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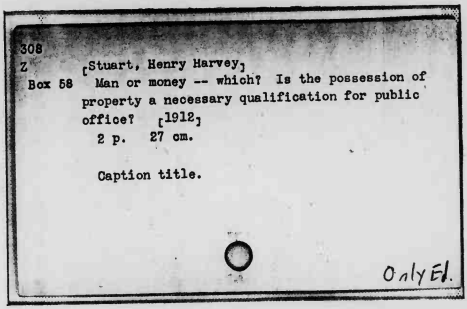
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[Stuart, Henry Harvey]
Man or money -- which? Is the possession of property a necessary qualification for public office? [1912]
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MAN
OR
MONEY==
WHICH?

Oxford

STOCK No. 153

MADE IN U.S.A.

MAN OR MONEY—Which?

Is the Possession of Property a Necessary Qualification for Public Office?

308
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Box 58

In Newcastle (N. B.) Town Council, on February first, 1912, Alderman Henry Harvey Stuart, seconded by Alderman Thomas W. Butler, K. C., moved the following resolution:

1. That this Town Council request the government of New Brunswick and the Legislature to introduce and pass at the next session of the latter an act to so amend the Towns Incorporation Act as to empower:

(A) The town of Newcastle, upon a majority vote of its town council or upon a majority vote of its qualified ratepayers voting either at a regular town election or at a special time set apart for such voting, to reduce or abolish within its jurisdiction Income and Property Qualifications, or either of them, for candidates for the offices of Mayor and Alderman:

(B) Any County, City or Town in the Province, upon a majority vote of its qualified ratepayers, voting at a regular municipal election or at a special time set apart for such voting, to reduce or abolish within its jurisdiction Income and Property Qualifications, or either of them, for voters and for candidates for the offices of County Councillor or Mayor and Alderman.

2—That this town council request the co-operation of the union of N. B. municipalities and of the councils of all the municipalities of the province in pressing the beforementioned legislation upon the local government and legislature.

To this resolution (which was lost, on division, Aldermen Stuart and Butler voting yea and Aldermen Clark, Dickison, Kethro, Russell and Stables, nay). Alderman Stuart spoke as follows:

We are, as a people, much inclined to boast of the freedom of our representative institutions, but, when we take the trouble to look beneath the surface of things, we see that our system of representation is very far from being perfect—that it is, in many cases, grossly unfair and partial and evidently intended to keep the common people quiet under injustice by making them believe that they have an equality of opportunity which they have not.

When, in 1264, under the dictatorship of Earl Simon the Righteous, representatives of the Commons were admitted to membership in the English parliament, until then exclusively composed of the great landed proprietors, that far-seeing statesman decreed that all members of the parliament should sit and vote in the same house on equal terms. But as soon as the reactionary element again triumphed they, afraid to abolish the representation of the Commons, did the next worst thing they could, that is, separate the Lords and Commons, reserving to the so-called upper house the right to veto any Act of the representatives of the mass of the people. Thus, till 1911, for over 600 years, the British Commons were subject to the supremacy of an hereditary aristocracy owing its authority in the first place to the mere brute force of the sword that accomplished the Norman Conquest.

(OVER)

And, to keep membership in the Commons itself as exclusive as possible, there was no salary for members of that house until last year.

In 1867 by the British North America Act, there was saddled upon Canada at the time when the incubus of the old legislative council should have been relegated to oblivion an appointed and irresponsible Senate which possesses the veto in all things and will not hesitate to use it when anything of real value to the working class is proposed by the Commons.

Then, again, although there is no property qualification for candidates for the Dominion Commons or Provincial Legislative Assemblies, the compulsory election deposits of $200 and $100, respectively, to be forfeited if the candidate does not receive half as many votes as the winner, tend to prevent more than two political parties contesting elections — to choke off small parties and prevent open criticism of the leading parties by opponents of both.

In municipal affairs the people were, supposedly, given self government, but with a string to it. In some towns only property holders may vote, but in all our New Brunswick municipalities one must be assessed on so much real or personal property or both to be eligible for the position of Mayor or Alderman or County Councilior. That is, the man himself, no matter how honest, how industrious and energetic, how learned and accomplished and NO MATTER HOW POPULAR WITH HIS FELLOW CITIZENS, does not count. He may not represent his neighbors unless he is assessed on so much property. Surely this is carrying the worship of the Golden Calf to the extreme of absurdity. This is to say, in effect, that all our municipal representatives now holding office, among whom there are many men of ability and integrity, would, if they should suddenly become unable to qualify financially, become at once unfit to retain their positions. Our municipal law says in, effect, that only the ability to make money and gain and hold on to property fits a man for membership on boards which control the raising and spending of municipal money, the appointment of assessors to value property and apportion taxes and officers to carry out the law. Thus the control of local direct taxation is kept exclusively in the hands of the propertied class as, by the veto of appointed governors and appointed senators and the absence from our system of the Initiative, the Referendum and the Recall, the indirect taxation imposed by the Provincial and Dominion governments is kept out of the hands of the common people.

All this should be changed. The system is unjust. ALL WHO PAY TAXES SHOULD BE EQUALLY ELIGIBLE for the positions controlling the levying and spending of those taxes. Otherwise, the right to vote is a farce. OF WHAT USE IS THE VOTE IF THE VOTERS MAY NOT VOTE FOR WHOM THEY WISH TO REPRESENT THEM? If they must be limited in their choice to members of a certain class—those with so much property—why not deprive them of the vote altogether and let the property holders have all power in name as well as in actual fact?

The argument, often used, that those who have not acquired real or personal property have to pay only a very small portion of the taxes and have no stake in the municipality and, therefore, no interest in the wise and economical government of the same has no foundation in fact. The propertied man ultimately pays the least tax. He who lives in a rented house, and not the owner, ultimately pays all the taxes on that house, for the owner fixes the rent to cover the cost of wear and tear and taxes and leave a clear profit for himself. So with the business men—they add their taxes to the cost of the goods they sell and the consumer pays the bill. The citizens who own only the houses they occupy and the farmers who work their own land without hired help are not much better off, in these days of combination and Trusts, than the landless and houseless wage-earner, and their interests are the same as his.

The landless and houseless man whose direct tax is low, but whose indirect tax in rent, etc., is highest of all, has a much greater interest in the prosperity of his town or country than has the more well to-do citizen, for it is harder for the former to make a living. Knowing, as by sad experience he is coming to know, that any rise in rent and prices finally comes out of him, he can be relied upon more than the latter to do his utmost to avoid borrowing and unnecessary expenditure. The present great indebtedness of our towns and cities, provinces and states and nations cannot be charged to the propertyless part of the population, for they have had no voice in incurring them. A change can only be for the better.

The practice of taxing those who are allowed no effective voice in the imposition and disposition of the money thus raised caused the revolt of the English Commons in 1642, the United States in 1775, Belgium in 1830, and has caused incalculable trouble since. The system is out of date in the twentieth century. It is time for a change. ALL ADULT CITIZENS—white and black, rich and poor, male and female—SHOULD HAVE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY IN EVERY WALK OF LIFE.

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